
INTERNATIONAL TEACHING PRACTICUM

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Abstract: This paper explores the experience of four pre-service special education teachers from Universitas Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI) Malaysia who undertook two months teaching practice in a Special School in Yogyakarta. Using qualitative data from an open-ended questionnaire, the pre-service special education teachers' experienced is investigated. The findings show that the experience is positive.

Keywords: Teaching practicum, pre-service special education teacher

1. INTRODUCTION

There is a global growing demands of having international networking among universities. As a result, many higher education institutions initiate and develop collaboration with other international organisations. Most of the times, the collaboration is determined by political will and educational policies (Kabilan, 2013). Furthermore, the current concept of borderless education which place emphasis on eliminating boundary of time, space and geographical factors in delivering education has also contribute to the growing demands of international networking that support collaboration and networking in multicultural context (Middlehurst, 2006).

International teaching practicum and placement has been part of practice in many universities in developed countries (Parr, 2013; Thomas, 2006). Equally, the trend has also become a practice in Asian countries (see Kabilan, 2013). Recently, Yogyakarta State University (YSU) Indonesia arranged an international teaching practicum for four Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI) Malaysia' pre-service special education teachers in a special school in Bantul Yogyakarta. This arrangement is part of the collaboration between those two universities. This paper report on the qualitative study conducted among those pre-service teachers. The aim of the study is to identify the professional development experiences during the teaching practicum from the pre-service teacher perspectives. In

order to fulfil the aim of the study, this paper will highlight some of the literature review regarding international teaching experience. Then it will describe the research context and process, and outline the findings and followed by the discussion and its implications.

2. METHOD

2.1 Research background and setting

As part of the collaboration between Universiti Pendidikan Sultan Idris (UPSI) and Yogyakarta State University (YSU), UPSI sent four students from Special Education Department to conduct teaching practicum in one of special school in Bantul, Yogyakarta. The practicum carried out for 8 weeks. During the practicum, each pre-service special education teacher had the opportunities to teach different type of disabilities in different level of schooling from kindergarten to secondary high school. They were given the opportunities to deliver 10 teaching session that includes eight assisted teaching and two independent teaching.

Apart from teaching, they were also entailed to participate in extracurricular activities such as scouting, school excursion and batik class. Each pre-service special education teacher were guided with one mentoring teacher. A supervising lecture from YSU was also provided. A supervising lecture came once a week to the special school to discuss any challenges and problems encountered by the pre-service special education teachers and mentoring teachers.

Before the teaching practicum conducted, all pre-service special education

teacher received a one day workshop related to special education in Indonesia, Indonesian culture and language.

2.2. Participants

The participant of the study were four pre-service special education teacher. All of them are female. Although, the participant of the study had opportunities to teach different type of disabilities during teaching practicum, one pre-service teacher specialised in visual impairment, two pre-service teachers specialised in hearing impairment, and one preservice teacher specialised in learning problems.

2.3. Data collection methods and analysis

Data was collected using open-ended questionnaires. Participants were coded as teacher 1, 2, 3 and 4. Data was analysed using thematic analysis (Creswell, 2008) where each segment of the text from the survey was labelled with a code then reduced overlap and redundancy. The next step is to collapse codes into themes.

3. Findings

There are four major themes emerged from the data analysis namely developing teaching skills, interpersonal skills, awareness to diversity and independence.

3.1 Developing teaching skills

The participant indicate that through international teaching practicum, they develop their teaching skills. They reported that they have confident to teach other type of disability other than their specialisation.

Teacher 2 explained that “in Malaysia, I only learn how to teach students with learning problems and never been taught how to teach other type of disabilities. During the teaching practicum here, I have to teach different type of disabilities. I am very nervous at the beginning. I do not know what to do, but my mentor gives support and guidance on what should I do and I am impressed with the positive students’ response”.

Furthermore, the participants clarify that they learn about different approaches to what they practice in Malaysia. For example the use of oral language in hearing impairment classes and the frequency of using slate and stylus in visual impairment classes. They find that by exposing to different approaches, they

became aware of more options and its advantages. As the result, they feel that they are confident to teach in different context. Teacher 3 explained that “knowing various approaches means that I can choose appropriate approach when teaching in different context”.

In addition, the international teaching practicum has also increase creativity in terms of designing teaching media. As one of participants claimed that “the school has limited teaching media, so I should make something to attract students’ interest for learning” (Teacher 4).

3.2 Developing interpersonal skills

International teaching practicum has provided the participants to enhance interpersonal skills by providing setting and opportunities to interact with wider communities from different cultures. Particularly, one participant maintained that “I am actually a very shy person, but the positive environment and supports that has enhance my social skills” (Teacher 2).

Interacting with people from different culture has also improved the way the participants interact with other people, especially with older people. Teacher 4 maintained that “there is level in using Javanese, people use different word to show respect to older people. Although I do not know how to use it, I learn to treat older people with more respect”. Moreover, all participants found that the richness of Javanese culture that were showed by the school communities has also strengthen the relationship and assist them in shaping their personalities as one of the participant stated “the harmonious culture showed in the school community has assisted me to develop positive personalities and I will take this experience and I will apply continuously what I have learned in Jogja” (Teacher 1)

3.3 Developing awareness to diversity

Participant specify that teaching in new working place and different culture has encouraged them to become aware of diversity in societies and as a result they more prepared to teach in global context. For instance, one of the participant highlight of routine activities at school where every morning the school staff

including the school principal will stand in the school lobby to welcome the students.

Another example is the use of mushala that do not distinguish between men and women. While the use of mushala in Malaysia is separated according to gender, it is shared in Jogja. She affirmed that “at the beginning, I feel awkward to share the mushala with men, but now, I become more tolerant” (Teacher 4).

3.4 Developing independence

International teaching experience has provided the participants with the opportunities to become more independent individual both as personal and professionals. Teacher 1 maintained that “teaching experience in Jogja develop my independence. I became more independent person. I think more rationally in making decision”, whereas teacher 4 asserted that “as a teacher, being away in a new environment is independent in terms of finding material for creating learning media. It is a hard work but it is paid off because most of the time the mentor teachers and the students like our work”.

4. DISCUSSION

The findings from the study show that international teaching practicum can enhance teaching skills. This is not unique as literature suggest that the one of the purpose of teaching practicum is to develop professional competence (Barkhuizen & Feryok, 2006; Ward & Ward, 2003; Willard-Holt, 2001). The findings of the study also mirrored to the findings of Kabilan’s research (2013) where he investigate the Malaysian pre-service teacher’ experience during teaching practicum in Maldives. His findings showed that international teaching practicum improved teaching skills and teaching confidence.

In regards to benefit of international teaching practicum in improving interpersonal skills, this finding is as the result of egalitarian-type of relationship between the pre-service teachers and the school community that are characterised by (1) mutual respect; (2) learning from each other; (3) understanding each other’s cultures; and (4) adaptation to different educational perspectives and beliefs (Kabilan, 2013, p. 205). Enhancing interpersonal skills was also evident in

research related to international teaching practicum (Lai, Gu, & Hu, 2015).

The finding indicate that international teaching practicum can develop awareness to diversity. This is consistent to the literature that identify the international teaching practicum as a mean for pre-service teacher in understanding diversity (Mahan, 1985; Mahan & Stachowski, 1990). It is reported that pre-service teachers who came back from international teaching practicum are more aware of cultural differences (Cushner & Mahon, 2002).

The finding suggest that international teaching practicum also enhance independence skills. This skills not only appeared to participants who undertook teaching practicum (Mahan, 1985; Mahan & Stachowski, 1990) but also to those who undertook study abroad (Bodycott & Crew, 2000; Lee, 2009). This can be occurred because (1) assistance is very limited in the new environment; (2) do not familiar with the support system available in the new place. As the result, participants can only relying on their selves to organise activities.

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